Abstract discussions will be held Thursday, April 14 at 7 p.m. and Friday, April 15 at 1 p.m. in Ryan Gym

Ronald Weasley and Professor McGonagall

An Honor Council Academic Trial

Released Spring 2011

This abstract was not completed in accordance with the timeline in the Constitution. The confronting party was given the opportunity to review this abstract prior to its release. The confronted party was unable to be reached.

Introduction

Ron Weasley was a student in Professor McGonagall’s Transfiguration class. Midway through the term, Honor Council received an email from Ron about being confronted by Professor McGonagall on the grounds of possible plagiarism. After several weeks of delay, the Honor Council Co-Chairs received a statement from Professor McGonagall, but despite constant reminders, Ron never submitted a statement. Despite their concern about the status of Ron’s statement, the Co-Chairs brought the issue to Council, who consented to a suspicion of violation and elected to send the case to an academic trial. Meanwhile, Ron said he would meet with Professor McGonagall on his own to discuss the situation, but since this meeting did not resolve the issue, the trial continued. One of the multicultural jurors did not attend the preliminary meeting. The jury consented to continue the trial without him.

Fact-Finding

Ron did not attend the Fact-Finding portion. In his absence, the jury was presented with a written statement he had prepared.

Professor McGonagall’s Statement:

The incident in question happened on a take-home Transfiguration midterm. Professor McGonagall assigned the midterm before spring break, and it was due the next week. The midterm was open-book and open notes. The day after the midterm’s due date, Professor McGonagall received an email from Ron, explaining that a friend (who was entrusted to turn in the midterm) had forgotten, and the midterm was attached to the email.

Professor McGonagall explained that in grading the midterm, she found the first part of the exam to be fine and deserving of passing marks. However, the second part of Ron’s exam seemed suspicious. The overall language of the test had changed, and it made references to outside material not discussed in the class. After searching the Internet, Prof McGonagall found
two articles that closely matched the thoughts and language of Ron’s paper. She concluded that some parts of the paper were plagiarized verbatim, and that these sentences (along with some that had only a few words changed) comprised about \( \frac{1}{4} \) of the second part of the exam.

Professor McGonagall contacted Ron a week later, explaining that she suspected him of plagiarism on the midterm. They scheduled a meeting to discuss the issue, but Ron did not show up. The meeting was rescheduled, and Ron acknowledged that plagiarism had occurred, but unintentionally so. Ron had come prepared with the articles in question, as well as his notes from Transfiguration, and explained that he had copied from his notes (based on these articles) without making citations, which ultimately resulted in plagiarism. Professor McGonagall then explained that she had a policy in her courses, in which a failed major assignment resulted in the failure of the class. Ron was told he was no longer welcome to attend Transfiguration.

Questions from the Jury

Since Ron was not present for this portion of the trial, all questions were directed at Professor McGonagall. One juror, familiar with Transfiguration, explained that citation was not necessary when stating common knowledge, however Professor McGonagall clarified that the material in question was too complex and specific to be considered common knowledge. She also commented that Ron should have known better, as a student bound by the Honor Code.

Another juror commented on the fact that Ron’s plagiarized statements came from his notes. Professor McGonagall explained that even if the sentences in question were cited in Ron’s weekly Transfiguration reading responses, it was his responsibility to transfer those citations to his exams. During the period of questioning, Professor McGonagall offered that Ron was currently on academic probation, which colored her decision to fail Ron. Additionally, she questioned Ron’s insistence that he had unintentionally plagiarized because he did not understand plagiarism.

On request of the jury, Professor McGonagall agreed to provide a copy of Ron’s examination to help the jury proceed.

Statement of Violation

The jury began by reviewing the facts of the case. The jury was unanimous on the fact that plagiarism had occurred, although there were questions about how egregious the plagiarism had been. The jury consented to the following statement of violation:

“Ron Weasley violated the Honor Code because he failed to properly cite all sources used in the preparation of written work and in doing so represented another person’s ideas as his own.”

Circumstantial Portion

The statement of violation, as well as the date and time for the circumstantial portion of the trial were sent to both the confronted and confronting parties. Professor McGonagall responded to the email with a marked copy of Ron’s exam, highlighting the portions surmised to
be plagiarized, as well as the two articles (also highlighted). Meanwhile, the Chair provided the jury with information about Ron’s previous Honor Code violation.

Ron did not attend the circumstantial portion. His absence caused members of the jury great disturbance. They deliberated as to whether they felt they could proceed without him. Some felt uncomfortable moving forward, noting that without Ron’s presence, it would be impossible to truly consider the circumstances surrounding the Honor Code violation. Another juror commented that Ron’s absence from the trial process removed the intended educational aspect of the trial, making it seem more punitive than restorative. Another commented that Ron’s standing on academic probation seemed serious enough motivation to attend the trial, while another commented that Ron’s ambivalence about the trial was troubling. Since Ron had blamed the plagiarism on “poor planning,” many jurors wanted to understand the circumstances that led to his act, and wished to have Ron present to explain. Without Ron’s input, the jury worried any proposed resolutions would not reflect what was best for Ron and his relationship to the community.

Other jurors felt comfortable moving forward. One cited that Ron’s neglect to participate in the trial process to this point warranted moving forward without him. Others felt that it was this exact point that made them so passionately want to hear from Ron himself.

After much consideration, the jury decided to proceed with the knowledge that Ron would have another opportunity to present his situation during the presentation of resolutions. The jury agreed to deliberate again after this presentation, if necessary. The circumstantial portion of the trial was very short, given the fact that the jury did not have the chance to speak with Ron in person. The jury did, however, discuss the articles provided by Professor McGonagall, as well as the statement from Swarthmore College’s Judiciary Committee that indicated that Ron’s previous act of plagiarism was “one of the most egregious cases of plagiarism” they had seen.

Tentative Resolutions

While Professor McGonagall suggested a resolution to send the case to the Committee on Student Standing and Programs (CSSP), which was in charge of overseeing Ron’s academic probation, most jurors felt that since CSSP is a separate entity not so much concerned with community restoration, Honor Council was an appropriate entity to see the case.

The issue of restoration was very important for the jury. It appeared to the jury that Ron and Professor McGonagall’s relationship was nonexistent following the email that he was no longer welcome in Transfiguration. Jurors hoped for a restorative resolution between the two. Additionally, the jury suggested that Ron should write an essay about what plagiarism is, why it’s academically dishonest, and why the consequences are so severe. Another suggested providing a link to Maud McInerney’s essay about plagiarism as a resource. Yet another jury member suggested referring Ron to CAPS to see a learning specialist that could help build time management skills, a lack of which seemed to lead to the initial plagiarism.

The jury was most divided about the issue of separation from the community. The Honor Code suggests separation as the appropriate action to take in a situation like Ron’s, particularly after a repeated violation. However, many jurors were very uncomfortable making the decision to separate Ron having not heard his story, despite the procedure set forth by the Honor Code.
Ultimately it was determined that it was both in Ron and the community’s best interest for him to be separated for one semester, particularly given that this was his second plagiarism violation.

Finally, one juror suggested Ron write a letter to the community, including in it what plagiarism is, why it shouldn’t be done, and how it affects others.

The jury unanimously consented on the following tentative resolutions:

1. Ron will have at least one meeting with the learning specialist or a CAPS representative to discuss time management issues.
2. Ron will be separated from the community for one semester.
3. Ron will write a letter to the community about his experiences with plagiarism. He will also address the question of what plagiarism is and how it affects the community. In order to engage with the idea of plagiarism, he will read Maud McInerney’s essay entitled “Plagiarism and How to Avoid It,” and he will refer to it in his letter.
4. Ron will meet with Professor McGonagall to come to a mutual understanding of the situation and to address any remaining concerns.

Discussion of Resolutions

While, according to the Constitution, the jury was supposed to meet within 24-48 hours after the tentative resolutions were set, Ron informed the jury late the night of the finalizing resolutions meeting that he would not be able to attend. A meeting with Ron was then scheduled, after much difficulty, for the following week. At the beginning of the meeting, the jury consented again on the previously proposed tentative resolutions.

Ron joined the jury, and the Chair read the tentative resolutions aloud. Ron expressed that he liked all of the resolutions, except for the one that he would be separated from the community, citing that it would not beneficial to restoration with the community. He suggested that instead of being separated, he would have weekly meetings with his dean or advisor to check in throughout the term. He explained that during his first year he had been separated due to poor grades. This separation had been helpful because he had not been ready for college and separation had given him time to collect himself before he tried again. However, he commented that this separation did not help him academically, and that separation didn’t help resolve academic troubles, it only covered them up. Instead, he hoped for a resolution that would allow him to graduate on time, while also understanding plagiarism within a community context more effectively. He explained his need for support within the community, rather than separation from it.

The jury was specifically concerned with the fact that this was a repeated instance of plagiarism, and that separation was designed to address that concern. Ron restated a point in his written statement that his footnotes were misplaced in Professor McGonagall’s notes, and that he had not intended to commit plagiarism.

Discussion moved to alternate resolutions that could replace separation, while also keeping in mind that separation could not be taken lightly. Ron suggested a more structured resolution to deal with accountability, such as meeting with professors before assignments are due. He believed that this would both aid him academically and help him understand his role in the community. Ron frequently returned to his need for structured support. He also commented that if he were at home, it would be more difficult for him to understand his place in the
community, and that further separation would just decrease his feelings of belonging to the community.

One juror suggested that Ron not be separated, but take fewer courses to allow more time for them. Ron responded that it was not the number of courses that was the issue, but rather that he simply does not understand plagiarism. Ultimately, he did say that if it took just taking two classes a semester to avoid separation, he would be willing to comply. When asked if he understood plagiarism, Ron commented that the issue in front of the jury was clear evidence that he did not have a clear understanding of plagiarism; however many of the proposed resolutions would allow him to change that. Another juror suggested Ron access the Writing Center and the writing partners program so that he could confer with another student about his papers in order to avoid another incident.

Ron concluded by saying that he knew the jury would do what they felt would be best for him and the community, and that he would do his best to learn from his mistakes regardless of what the jury decided. The jury then returned to deliberation about the tentative resolutions, given their newly established direct contact with Ron.

**Deliberations Part I**

The jury first considered the severity of Ron's plagiarism. Ron viewed it as an innocent mistake of copying and pasting, but Professor McGonagall saw it as the central issue of the trial. Ultimately the jury decided that Ron and Professor McGonagall could discuss this in their meeting.

Then the jury thought about having Ron meet with his dean or faculty advisor weekly. The purpose of the meetings would be partly for Ron to talk about what plagiarism was and why it was wrong, and partly for Ron's advisor or dean to hold him accountable for time management, because it seemed to be the main reason for Ron's plagiarism. The jury thought this would be helpful, but some members were uncomfortable making it a resolution because they didn't want to mandate the meetings, although they did want to suggest to Ron that he meet with his dean or advisor regularly. Some jury members were also uncomfortable with this as a resolution because it seemed to make it others' job to solve Ron's problems. The jury also considered having Ron meet with members of the jury, but some jurors were again uncomfortable with making it other people's job to help Ron fix his problems. In the end, though, the jury seemed fine with mandating that Ron meet with people as long as Ron eventually learned to manage his time himself.

The jury first thought about separation as a form of accountability. If Ron liked being at Haverford, then separating him from the community could be a significant consequence, which might be appropriate to an instance of plagiarism. The facts of this case were also very severe: the plagiarism was egregious, and Ron had plagiarized before and ought to know better. Furthermore, after plagiarizing, Ron had been uncooperative throughout the trial process, only showing up when he knew that separation was being considered.

However, the jury ran into trouble when considering education and restoration. Ron had already said that if he spent a semester at home, he wouldn't learn anything from it. The jury's views were mixed on this point – it didn't want to, in effect, let Ron veto separation by refusing to learn anything from it. On the other hand, the jury was responsible for educating Ron and
restoring him to the community. If separation wouldn't achieve that, then perhaps the jury shouldn't separate him.

Some jurors argued that separation was an opportunity for a person to reconsider why they wanted to remain at Haverford. But others said that while separation could be restorative, it wouldn't be in this case. The jury was skeptical that Ron would make the most of his separation, because he had been uncommitted to the trial process. However, it also thought that, ultimately, it couldn't make a process restorative for someone else – that was the person's job. One juror said that separation is valuable because it lets people reflect on and understand Haverford, but that Ron wouldn't benefit from it because he didn't understand the benefit of a Haverford education or the value of the Haverford community. Another argued that Ron needed to have his hand held and learn how to survive at Haverford with Haverford’s guidance. Another juror pointed out that it might be harder for Ron to learn from separation because he'd already had a negative experience with being separated.

The jury considered whether separation would help educate Ron by giving him the chance to work on his time management in a simpler environment where he had fewer things to do. But jurors also thought that having Ron in the Haverford community would force him to reflect on what he'd done and his role in the community, whereas having him living away from Haverford would not. One juror disputed whether separation was ever truly restorative. She said it made sense in social situations, but in academic cases it was “just because.” This juror was opposed to separation.

The jury was also aware that Ron might be separated from the college even if they didn't do it, because he was on academic probation, and receiving a 0.0 in a class would cause CSSP to review his case.

The jury also considered its responsibility to the community. Some jury members were worried that not separating Ron would send a bad message to the Haverford community about how serious plagiarism was. The jury recognized that it also needed to protect the Haverford community from people who might damage its trust. Some jurors found it hard to believe that Ron could come back the next semester and be “a good Havercitizen,” and therefore wanted to separate him for a bit. It also seemed that Ron wasn't really dedicated to the Haverford community.

A key moment for the jury came when one juror spoke about community. The juror felt that a community should embrace its members, help them overcome their personal issues, and work together to make the community stronger from within. She felt that members of the community had minimal involvement in this case, because Ron's plagiarism didn't affect them very much, but that separating Ron would have a huge impact on Ron's life. She didn't think that the well-being of the other members of the Haverford community should take precedence over Ron's in this issue, since they were affected so little and he was affected so much. She said that at some point it would be Ron's job to fix himself, but that everyone deserves help. She felt that Ron had to be held accountable, but that the Haverford community had a responsibility to continue to embrace him.

Some jurors argued that not separating Ron would put the community in danger, but this juror challenged them to say what concrete issues would be caused by letting Ron stay; and said that if there were such issues, it was the jury's job to make resolutions to address them.
Deliberations Part II

At the start of the second meeting for deliberations, the jury went around and said how they felt about separating Ron. One juror said he had been on academic probation before, and he understood that it was a very isolating experience, and that removal from the community would only make things worse. One juror felt that the jury had to take Ron's well-being into account as well as the community's, and that there should be some way to restore Ron to the community besides separation. One juror said she was leaning towards separation. One juror said that she was leaning strongly towards separation because of the severity of Ron's actions, and said that it would be “almost paternalistic” not to separate Ron. One juror agreed, and said that he didn't want to keep Ron at Haverford just because Ron said he wouldn't learn anything at home.

The jury then asked what ideal resolutions addressing accountability would be. One juror thought of making Ron retake the course without credit, but that didn't seem to address the main concern of plagiarism. One juror thought that failing the course and writing a letter to the community would hold Ron accountable enough.

The jury was divided on the question of separation, but most jurors seemed willing to let Ron back into Haverford if they could find some other resolution that would hold him accountable for his actions in a similar way. An idea emerged of Ron meeting with people throughout the semester to talk about the Haverford community, so he would have no choice but to confront what the community meant and why his actions had hurt it. The jury ultimately worked out a resolution in which Ron would meet with three members of the jury periodically throughout the next semester to discuss the Honor Code and the Haverford community.

When this resolution had been worked out, eight jury members consented to move forward without separation. One juror stood outside of consensus on this issue because he was not completely comfortable with not separating Ron, but also felt that the issue had been discussed to his satisfaction.

Final Resolutions

The jury consented on the following final resolutions:

1. Ron will have at least one meeting with the learning specialist or a CAPS representative to discuss time management issues.
2. Ron will write a letter to the community about his experiences with plagiarism. He will also address the question of what plagiarism is and how it affects the community. In order to engage with the idea of plagiarism, he will read Maud McInerney’s essay entitled “Plagiarism and How to Avoid It,” and he will refer to it in his letter.
3. Ron will meet with Professor McGonagall to come to a mutual understanding of the situation and to address any remaining concerns.
4. Ron will have weekly meetings with his dean or faculty advisor for as long as they deem necessary in order to address his workload and study habits.
5. Ron will meet repeatedly over the course of the semester with willing members of the jury to discuss what it means to be a member of the Haverford community, including his role...
within the trial process. The involved jury members will write a report at the end of the semester assessing the usefulness of the meetings.

6. The jury strongly recommends that Ron participate in the Writing Center Writing Partners program.

Post Trial

After the trial, the Chair of the trial failed to communicate the final resolutions to the confronted and confronting parties until the confronted party was to be brought to CSSP, at which point the Dean of the College contacted the Chair requesting additional information from the trial, which CSSP would take into consideration in making their decisions. Upon learning of the final resolutions, the Dean of the College objected to the decision that had been made to not separate Ron from the community. The Dean cited the severity of the offense and its repeat nature as grounds for separation, and planned to appeal to the President of the College on what the Dean felt was a grave oversight by the jury. While the protocol for such an event is that the Dean of the College would communicate in person with the jury, the trial had happened during finals and school would not be in session for another three months, which made it impossible for such a meeting to occur.

The student did not return to Haverford the following semester.

Discussion Questions

1. Should juries proceed without a juror? Given the Multicultural Juror Requirement, does it make a difference when the juror is a student of color?
2. Should juries proceed without the confronted party present?
3. Is it appropriate for juries to avoid separation because they believe a student won’t learn from the experience?
4. Is separation ever restorative?
5. How should previous violations influence a jury’s discussion?